A.N.V. STORY READERS

GRADE II

OLD TALES RETOLD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

A. N. Venkateswar & Bros., Triplicane, Madras.

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

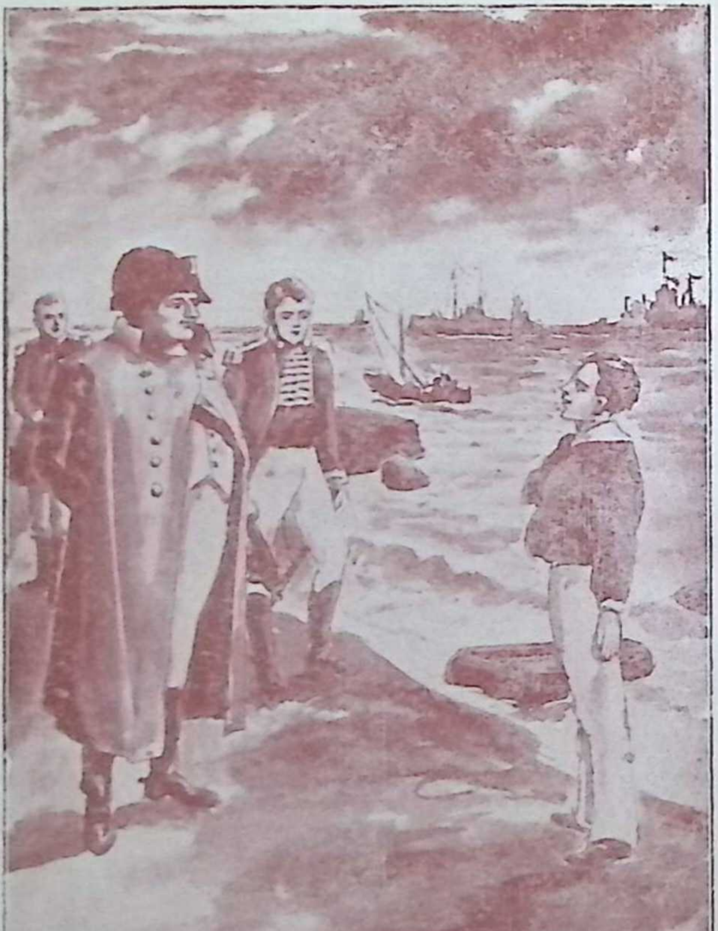
This little book contains eight small stories that are old —old in the sense that they have been told by others in other garbs, and are not, as they are, adapted for the use of beginners in general reading. And this adaptation is the work sought to be achieved in this book. - - -

These stories, again, are a paradox in themselves, in so far as their juvenile readers are concerned; for while being "Old Tales Retold," they are new in the sense that they are not drawn from the Indian classics or mythology, from which the vast majority of story-readers in school use draw material at present. These secular stories, therefore, if they may be so called, are calculated to serve as a refreshing change from, and a wholesome alternative to, the classical ones, which, with all their merits and excellences, tend, particularly in the hands of indifferently skilled compilers, to become trite, and to lose in value, in their appeal to children. - -

The stories are carefully selected with special reference to their simplicity of interest, and directness of appeal, without glaringly protruding morals tacked on to the end. There is, too, a variety of interest provided, ranging from humour to pathos, so as to stimulate the appetite for general reading in the young ones. - -

It is hoped that these stories will find welcome from the school-going children, coming as they do with the double recommendation of being new, yet twice-told. -

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Napoleon and the English Sailor.

I. THE BOY THAT SAVED A TOWN

MANY parts of Holland are below the sea-level. The sea is kept back from them by means of dams. These dams are called dykes.

In one such place, the sea opened a leak in the dyke, on a certain evening. The leak was small. It could easily be closed at once. But no one noticed it except a little boy. It must soon have got bigger. Then, in a few hours, the whole town must have gone under water.

But that little boy saved the town by his brave and noble deed. This little story tells of that boy-hero.

On that evening, the boy's mother sent him with food to his father. He was at work away from home. The day was nearing sunset.

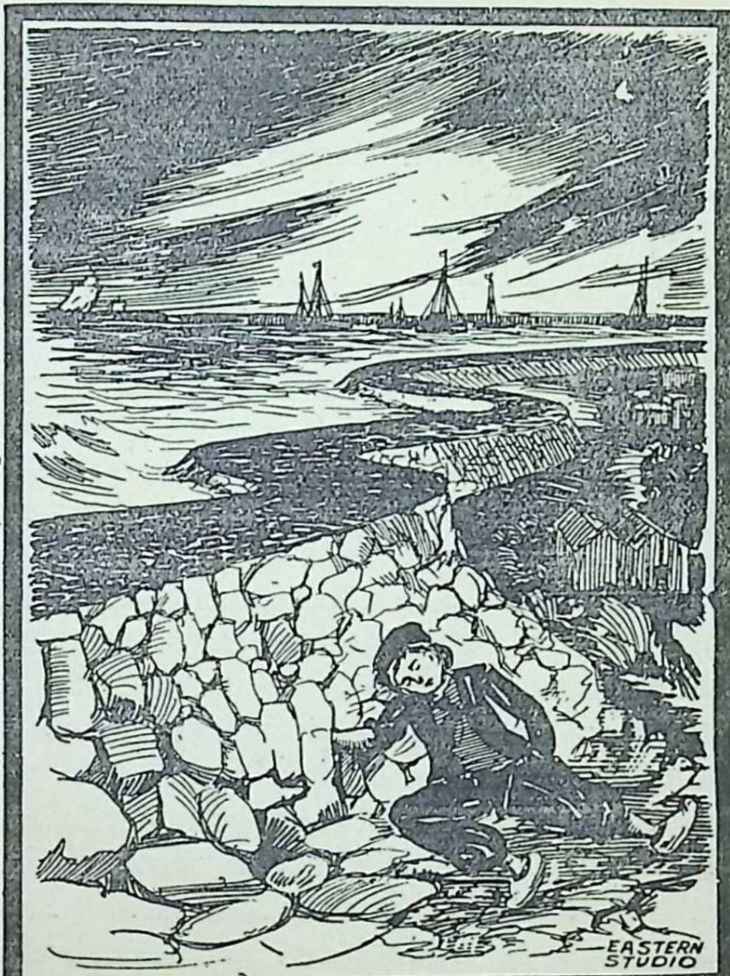
The boy gladly left his play-mates, and carried the food to his father. Then he returned home. His way lay along the

dyke. He heard a trickling sound coming from the dyke. He paused and listened. He got up the bank in a moment. He found a small stream of water oozing out through the leak.

The boy knew the danger at once. He had no time to run and warn any one. In a very short time, the leak would become larger. Then it could not be stopped. There was only one way to save the town. And he took it.

The leak was then just as small as his own little hand. So he thrust his hand into the leak. Lo! The water stopped. The boy felt glad. He hoped some one would pass that way. Then the warning could be given. With his hand in the leak, the boy waited.

He waited long. No one passed that way. The sun set in the west. Night came on; and darkness filled the place. Hour after hour, the boy waited in patience. His fingers pained. Hunger pressed hard. He felt faint and weary. The night was cold. His body shivered. But the boy's



" He kept on till morning, like a true soldier at his post."

heart was brave. He would not give way to pain or fear.

So he kept on till morning, like a true soldier at his post. On no account would he take out his hand. For that would be the ruin of all.

In the mean time, the mother at home waited long for the beloved child. It grew very late. Still the boy did not come. She thought, "Perhaps he has stayed with his father; both would come home to-gether."

It grew later still. The father came back home. But Oh! where was her beloved boy? He could not tell. Both sat up and watched. And they watched the whole of the night.

Morning came. Some men were coming to their house in a crowd. In the midst of the crowd, the poor parents saw a fearful sight. A little body was being carried on the shoulders of men. That surely must be their little boy; and surely, too, he must have died!

Their loving hearts seemed to burst within them.

But no! The boy is brought home weak and faint. But he is not dead. The mother takes her boy on her lap. She sprinkles water on his face. She gently fans and fondles him. The boy opens his eyes. God be praised! The boy is alive; he will soon be well.

And he got well. There have been many great heroes in Holland. Their names are sung in songs, and told in tales, all over the country. But no name is held more dear than that of Peter; for that was the name of the little boy who saved the town from the anger of the sea.

II. READY WIT

IN olden days, there were many wars between the Moslems and the Persians. In one of those wars, the Persians were defeated.

The bravest among the Persians was Harmosan. He fought hard and long. Many Moslem soldiers fell by his sword.

But, at last, the Moslems fell on him in numbers, and put him down.

The Caliph was the lord of the Moslems. He now sat on a throne in his camp. Soldiers stood in arms in front of him.

Harmosan was brought before him by Moslem soldiers. The Caliph gave orders to his men. He said that Harmosan *must* die.

The brave Harmosan cried out :

" My Lord ! I am thirsty. Give me but one cup of water to drink. Let me quench my thirst, before I die."

The Caliph ordered a cup of water to be given him. Harmosan took the cup in his hand. But he did not take it to his lips ; he did not drink the water straight away. He stood quiet, with the cup in his hand.

The Caliph said to him,

" Brave man ! why don't you drink the water ? Do you fear these armed soldiers around you ? They will not harm you. They will not stab you while drinking. They are brave men ; And they fight

hard. But they are also true and noble. Moslems never kill a foe who cannot fight. Drink, therefore, without fear."

Harmosan seemed still in fear. He would not drink the water yet. He looked at the Moslem soldiers, and paused.

The Caliph spoke to him kindly again. He said,

"Drink without fear, good man! I give you my word. You shall not die, before you drink away that cup of water."

Lo! quick as thought, Harmosan dashed the cup to the ground. It broke to pieces by the fall. The water sank into the hot, desert sand.

Then said he to the Caliph,

"Oh great Lord! I should not die before I drink away that water. You have said the word. The word of a king must not fail. So bid your men gather up the spilled water for me."

Anger rose in the Caliph's mind. But he kept it down, and sat quiet for a moment.

Then he spoke to the Persian, saying.

"Yes, you are right. The word of a king should never fail. I will surely hold to my promise. I will not make my word false."

Then he bade his men bring another cup of water. They brought and gave it to Harmosan. And the Caliph said to him,

"I said before, *Drink and die.* Now I bid you, *Drink and live.*"

Harmosan now drank the water without fear. Thus did he escape a cruel death by his *ready wit.*

III. NAPOLEON AND THE ENGLISH SAILOR

FRANCE is a large and beautiful country in Europe. It lies to the south of England. The English Channel lies between them. This is really not a mere channel, but an arm of the sea.

About a hundred and fifty years ago, the people of France rose against their king and the nobles. The king and queen were put to death. Many nobles also fell; and

many more fled to other countries. The chief men of the people's party formed a Council. This Council ruled the country.

The French waged war in many countries. In those wars, a young soldier rose to power. By degrees, he became the Commander of the whole French army. This gave him the greatest power in the country. And he became the ruler of it. His name was Napoleon.

Napoleon led his army to many countries in Europe. His army fought many battles. In all of them, Napoleon won victory.

Once Napoleon was staying with his army at Boulogne. It was a big town on the French coast. It lay on the French shore of the English Channel.

During that period, the French captured an English seaman. They took him to Boulogne as a prisoner. But he was not put in prison. He was left free to walk about on the shore. For there was no means of escape.

The sailor sat on the beach all day long. He looked on the sea in sadness. His thoughts went over to England all the time. There was some one there much loved by him. He sat thus on the beach and watched for many days. He grew sadder and sadder. The thought of home filled his mind. He would not rest. Night and day, he watched and wept at heart.

One night, he saw an empty cask washed ashore. An idea came to his mind. He would make that cask into a boat. He would hide it from the Frenchmen's sight. He would sail in it, and cross the channel.

He hid the cask in a secret place. He worked on it unknown to others. He worked hard for many days. He had no weapons to work with. But by patient toil, he made it float like a boat. He got into it unseen by any ; so he thought. And he was about to start on his dangerous voyage.

But some French soldiers saw him. They ran and captured him. They took him to Napoleon.

The sailor's head was bowed in grief; but he was so young and brave. The General gently spoke to him, saying, "Young man! Do you not know the dangers of the sea? Did you think that wretched cask could cross the channel? How can you risk your life so foolishly? Perhaps a young wife pines for you at home!"

The youth looked up. He looked boldly upon the face of the mighty hero, and said to him, "Nay, Sire! No young damsel waits for me across the sea. But an aged mother pines for her son. She suffers from hunger and cold. She wastes her frame for lack of food. I long to see my mother before she dies! And by God's grace, I long to save her from the cruel hand of Death."

The touching tale moved the heart of the mighty man. He said to the youth, "Go, young man! You are free. Go home, and cherish your aged mother."

And he ordered his men to send the youth safely to England in a ship. Once

more the feet of the brave young sailor touched his native English shore. And, we may be sure, he saved his aged mother from want and death.

IV. KING SOLOMON AND THE BEES

SOLOMON was king of Jerusalem, the land of the Jews, in ancient days. He was the wisest of all men. He knew more things than any other man or woman in the world. His fame spread all over the ancient kingdoms.

One day, there came to his court, the Queen of Sheba. She was the Queen of Ethiopia. She, too, had heard of the wisdom and learning of Solomon. And she wished to see him, and to judge for herself the truth about his wisdom.

She brought with her two wreaths of flowers. They were both alike and beautiful. There were many different colours of flowers in them.

She stood before the great king with a wreath in each hand. And she said to him,

"Sire ! Here are two wreaths of flowers. They have been culled from Nature's garden. The flowers in the other wreath are not real. They are false, and were made by human hand. Now, can you tell, Sire, truly and well, which is real and which false ?"

King Solomon sat quiet for long. He could not find any difference between the two. They were both so like one another and so real.

The Queen of Sheba spoke again to Solomon. She said, "Oh wisest of men ! Need you take so much time to find out the true from the false flower? Is it worthy of you to spend so much time over this small matter ?"

But still Solomon was silent. Perhaps he could not tell the true flowers from the false.

A little while after, he chanced to turn his look to the window. It had glass doors. Through the doors, he saw a swarm of bees outside. They were

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crowding about a faded rose, in search of honey.

And lo ! The king's face was lit with a smile. He called out to a servant, and bade him open the window.

The man opened the window at the king's command. At once the bees flew into the hall, and they swarmed around one of the wreaths.

"There ! that is the wreath of real flowers," said King Solomon. And the Queen of Sheba wondered at the wisdom of the king.

But he said to her,

"Nay, call me not wise ! I could not myself tell the true flowers from the false, I needed the teaching of these creatures. They, indeed, are wiser than I in this little matter. No man knows all. He has to learn many things from others. Even fools may sometimes teach us a thing or two. There are lessons to be learnt from the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, and the insects crawling on the earth.

V. KING JOHN AND THE RICH ABBOT

KING John ruled over England many hundred years ago. In his time, the priests were rich and powerful. Some of them were thought to be richer than the king himself. One of them was the Abbot of Canterbury. He was said to keep a hundred servants.

So, one day, the king said to him, "How now, Father Abbot! Do you keep a better house than I? So people tell me."

The Abbot said, "Nay, Sire! They speak not the truth. Vile tongues speak false. For I live a simple life; and my fair is humble."

King John would not believe the words of the Abbot. He said, therefore, "Your guilt is proved, Father Abbot; and you must be punished with death. But I will give you a chance to live."

"I have three questions for you. You must answer them rightly. Or you lose your head!"

Then the king stated his questions to the Abbot. They were—

(1) What am I worth exactly on my throne, with the crown on my head ?

(2) How long would it take me to go round the world ?

(3) What am I thinking now ?

The Abbot heard the questions. He could find no proper answers for them. So he begged the king for three weeks' time.

The king granted the time, saying, "Be sure to find me proper answers. Or get ready to die."

The Abbot went from place to place. He sought the wisest men of the land. He told them the questions. He waited for their answers. But not one was equal to the task.

The three weeks were nearly over. There were but three days more ; and then he must take the answers to the king.

The Abbot was coming home to his Abbey in great sorrow. His head was bent with fear and care. His weary steps were slow.

Now, the Abbot's shepherd chanced to pass that way. He saw the Abbot, and bowed low to him. Then he looked up, and saw great sorrow on his face.

The shepherd was a very old servant of the Abbot. So he made bold to say to the Abbot, "My lord! I see great sorrow on your face. I am pained to see it. Your oldest servant am I. May I know the cause of your sorrow?"

The thought of death makes all men humble. And the Abbot told the poor man the sad tale.

Now, the shepherd was wise in his way. He had all his wits about him. He never lacked courage. And he said to the Abbot, "Good Lord! Fear not. Let me go to the king in your robes. I will answer the questions sure and straight. I will earn the king's good will. And I will bring his pardon to you. I look like your Lordship greatly, as you know."

The Abbot said to himself. "What answers can this ill-read fellow find for the questions of the king? The wisest and

the most learned men have failed to answer them. But the drowning man catches hold of a straw. I see no other way of escaping death. Let the fellow have his way. Greater harm cannot come of it to me. No harm can be greater than death."

So he gave his own robes to the man, and sent him to the king.

"Welcome, Sir Abbot!" said the King. "I am glad to see you here in time. And I trust you have your answers ready for me. Well, then, here is my first question:

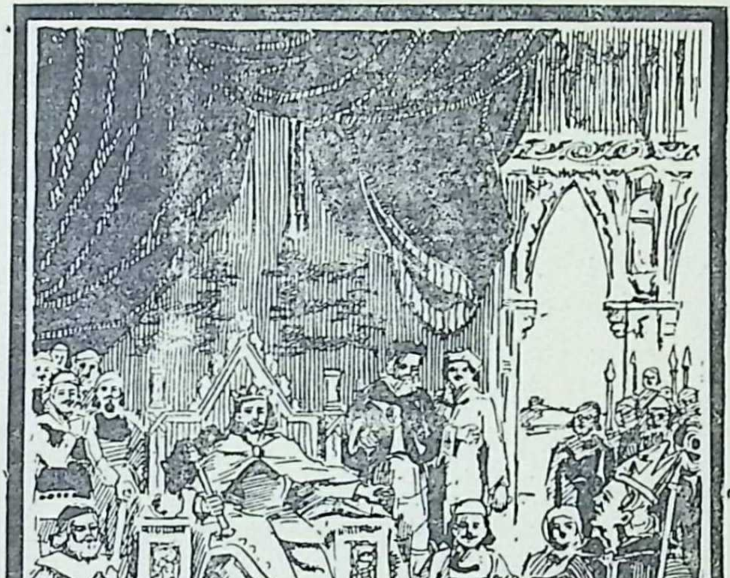
"*What am I worth exactly on my throne, with my crown on my head?*"

"Now for your answer?"

Shepherd: "A sovereign *minus* a crown is fifteen shillings. So, a sovereign with a crown is twenty-five shillings; not a farthing more or less!"

The king laughed merrily, and said, "What? Is that all I am worth? Very well! I cannot find fault with your answer. Now for my second question.

"*How long would it take me to go round the world?*"



" Your majesty thinks that I am the Lord Bishop himself,"

"What is your answer?"

Shepherd: "Rise with the sun and ride with him till the next morning. So Your Majesty can go round the world in twenty-four hours."

The king could find no fault with this answer too. "Surely, I cannot hope to travel faster than the sun," he said. "And now, answer me truly,

What am I thinking now?"

Now all the people in the king's court wondered, "Who can tell the thoughts of another. No man can do it. The Bishop is sure to fail."

But no! The answer came, sure as shot. For the false Abbot said boldly,

"Your Majesty thinks I am the Lord Bishop himself. But mark me well. I am but his humble shepherd. And there is my answer, true and bold."

The king and all the court burst out into laughter. And King John was well pleased with the poor man for his clever wit. So he gave him gold, and pardoned the Abbot.

VI. A CLEVER JESTER

LONG ago, a certain king had a jester at his court. Now, jesters, you know, are thought to be fools. But it is not quite true. Their jests should not be ill-timed. They should not talk, when the king is angry or busy.

But this jester forgot the good rule. He made many jests in bad season. Now, the king wished to teach him better manners. So he said to the jester, one day,

"Your jests are ill-timed, Oh Fool! I have put up with them too long. But now I am minded to stop it once for all."

Then he called his guards and said to them, "Take this fool away, and put him to death at once."

The jester began to say something. But the king would not hear him.

"Silence, Fool!" said he, "I will not hear any excuse. But I will show you a small mercy.

You may yourself choose the manner of your death. But die you must."

Now the jester got his chance. He was full of ready wit. He knelt before the king, then rose, and said,

"Your will is law, Oh my noble Master! I will choose the manner of my death. I thank you for this mercy."

"Do so, then. Tell me quickly how you wish to die", said the king.

" I wish to die, Sire; of old age," said the jester laughing.

The king was caught by his own words. So he let the jester live, and took him again to favour.

VII. KNOW WELL BEFORE YOU JUDGE

ONCE a good man lived in a large village. He owned many acres of land. The land was rich in soil. There was no want of water-supply. Labour was cheap. So the land brought good gains yearly. And the good man lived an easy life with his wife and children.

The man bore a long name. But he commonly went by the name of Shallow. He lived in a large house. The house had a garden before, and another behind. It was a small bungalow.

Next to it was another garden-house. It had been vacant for some time. Its owner had gone abroad. But now a stranger came to live in it. His name does not matter to us. But he was known by the name of Thoughtful. And he was good, too, in his own way.

One day, Shallow was talking to a friend in front of his own house. It was some time after the coming of Thoughtful to the village. The talk turned on that neighbour.

"How do you like your neighbour, Shallow?" asked the friend.

"Not much, I fear" said Shallow.

Friend—Why so? Is he not a good man?

Shallow—Perhaps he is; perhaps he is not. I cannot tell. But, I can truly say

this; he has been no good neighbour to me.

Friend—Now, that is bad! For you are so good yourself. He cannot find a better neighbour than you. You must have good reasons for thinking so poorly of him.

Shallow—Yes, I have, to be sure.

Friend—May I know some of them.

Shallow—In the first place, he belongs to a different religious sect. So, I think, he does not like to move freely with us.

Friend—How do you make that out?

Shallow—He never comes to the village common to chat with us in the evening.

Friend—Has any of you ever asked him to join you?

Shallow—I do not remember—No! I do not think so. But he might have come without our asking. I tell you, my friend! He is not social; and, I think, he cares too much for his money.

Friend—How does he show it?

Shallow—Why? See how poorly he lives. And yet, I know, he is richer than many of us here.

Friend—Perhaps he spends his money in charity.

Shallow—There you are entirely wrong, my friend. For, only last week, a poor fellow came here. He belongs to a village at some distance. He brought a sad tale with him. He was a schoolmaster in that village. His school-house was a thatched hut. It caught fire some days back; and the whole hut was burnt out. The poor schoolmaster has a large family to support. And he is known to be an honest and well-meaning fellow. He came out with a free-gift list; and all of us gave our mite. Now, this man went to my neighbour, too.

Friend—And what did he say?

Shallow—Why? He just put off the fellow with an excuse. He said he would consider about the matter.

Friend—Did he consider?

Shallow—I do not know. Then again, he had a horse to sell some days back. I was in need of one. So I thought of buying it. My neighbour came to know of it. And what does he do at once? He sends it off straight to a fair.

Friend—That looks bad indeed. But why should he do so?

Shallow—I see no cause for it but his ill-will to me.

Then, again, my friend! My wife is very fond of flowers. She saw some new plant growing in his garden. And she wished for a cutting of it. My gardener spoke of her wish to his gardener; and he told his master of it.

Friend—Well! What happened?

Shallow—What should happen from such a neighbour? He ordered his gardener strictly not to touch the plant.

Friend—That is worse still. I can hardly think it possible for a gentleman.

Shallow—The worst is yet to come, my friend! Hear me. Sometime ago, I turned off a servant of mine for bad

behaviour. But he is a useful hand ; and he is not a bad sort, either, on the whole. I did not really want him to stop away. I only wished him to mend his manners. He would surely have come back to me a better man. But that could not be. For my neighbour has taken him on. I was not even asked for a character.

Friend—Now, that is far too bad indeed ! I am sorry for you. You must feel very unhappy with such a neighbour. Look ; there is a man coming to you, I think.

Shallow—Yes. That is the poor schoolmaster. Well, friend ! How do you get on with your list ?

Schoolmaster—My losses have been made good, Sir, without much trouble.

Shallow—I am glad to hear of it. But how did it happen ? Last time, your list did not come up even to one-half of your loss.

Schoolmaster—You are right, Sir. But your good neighbour had promised to consider, you know. The very next day,

he came to my place. I was not there. He asked the people there about me. So I was told. He was glad to hear a good report of me. I went to him a while ago. And he gave me a cheque for fifty pounds. That covers up the balance. I shall not need to trouble any others.

Shallow—What ? Fifty pounds ! A noble gift indeed !

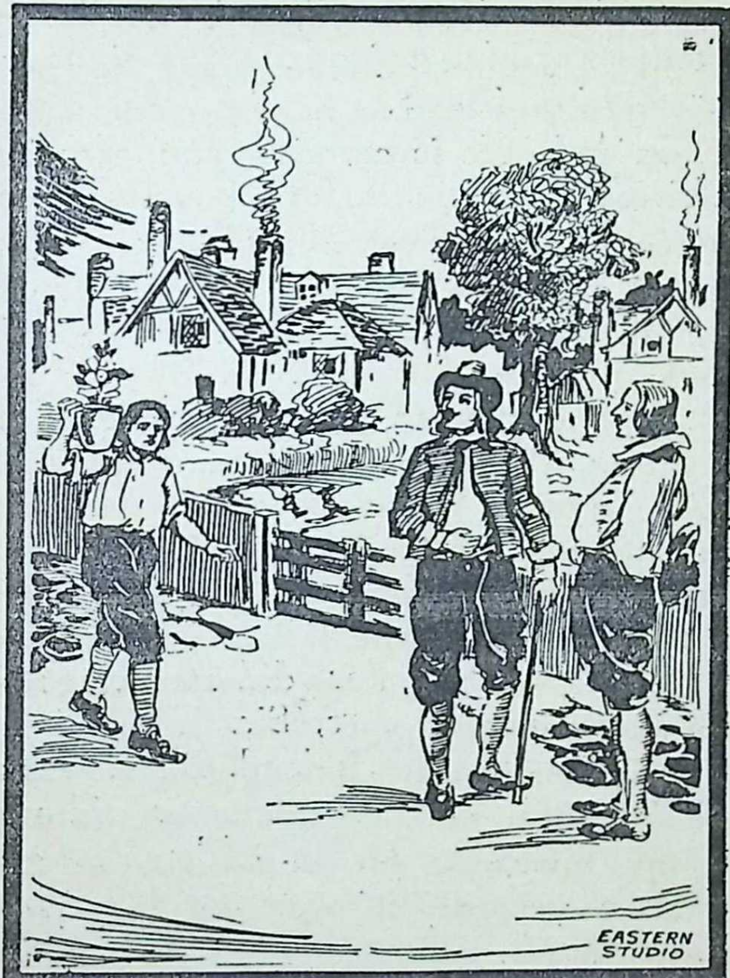
Friend—Surely your neighbour is not a miser. This does not prove him one. —Ah, now ! There is your gardener coming, with a large flower pot. That is a beautiful plant indeed. Is that the plant so liked by your wife ?

Shallow—Yes, it is—Now, come here, my man, How did you come by it ?

Gardener—Mr. Thoughtful sent for me. I went to him. He bade me take it to my mistress. He could not give it before ; because it was not fully well grown then.

Shallow—Has he more of this plant ?

Gardener—Not much, Sir. He has only a cutting of it.



"Ah, now! There is your gardener coming, with a large flower pot"

Shallow—Very well, go home, then—I am sorry I have judged my neighbour wrongly in this also.

Friend—He is certainly not wanting in civility.

Shallow—Not at all, I must own it. —Ah ! There is my neighbour's man coming back from the fair. He has sold away the horses, it seems.

Now, Tom ! How have horses gone at the fair ?

Tom—Dear enough, your honour.

Shallow—How much more did you get for your master than my price ?

Tom—My master did not want a better price than yours, Sir. The animal looked good enough, indeed. But it was a vicious creature. So my master did not like to sell it to you. He told me to get rid of it in the fair for any price. I got but a poor price for it in the fair, Sir ; for I was strictly told to speak the truth.

Shallow—Was that the real reason for his not selling the horse to me ?

Tom—It was, Sir, thank you ; Good morning, Sir.

Shallow—I see I am wrong in this matter, too. I must change my opinion of him. But, there is yet one thing against him. I mean his taking my servant into service.

Friend—But there is your servant, coming to you. Is that the fellow you mean ?

Shallow—Yes ; that is the fellow.

Servant—Master, forgive me. I have done wrong ; and I am sorry for it. I shall not behave badly in future.

Shallow—What ? Have you parted with your new master so soon ?

Servant—Mr. Thoughtful was never my master, Sir. He merely kept me for a few days. He advised me to let your anger pass. Then he bade me go to you and beg your pardon.

Shallow—Very well, go home, and mind your work. Be more careful in future.

Friend—Now, my good friend! What do you think of your neighbour?

Shallow—Oh! I have been wrong, my friend. I have been wrong in everything. I must go to him, and beg his pardon. Will you go with me?

Friend—Most willingly.

After this the two neighbours became very good friends. Mr. Shallow gave up his habit of judging people hastily. He took time to consider. And his opinions were never more faulty.

VIII. WILLIAM TELL

THERE is a small country in the middle of Europe, named Swit-zer-land. It is a beautiful country, with its mountains, rivers and lakes. Its people work hard and live simple lives. So they are strong and healthy.

Close to Swit-zer-land is the big country of Austria. In old days, the Austrians often waged war, and conquered

the hardy Swiss. So an Austrian officer often ruled over Swit-zer-land.

At one such time, there was a good Swiss shepherd named William Tell. He had a little son, who grazed his father's sheep. Both father and son were hale and strong; and they were proud of their native land.

One day, they came to a big town from their little village. There Tell saw a large crowd of Swiss people, both men and women. They stood hat in hand and heads bent before the Austrian Chief. An Austrian shouted in the ear of Tell, "Take off your hat, and bow down before your royal master."

But Tell stood straight and said, " My knee shall bend to God alone." The Austrian chief grew wild with anger and said to his men, "He mocks my power. So put him to death at once."

The men took hold of Tell. But again the Chief spoke to his men, and said, "Wait ; do as I bid you. Bind that little

boy to the lime tree yonder, and place an apple on his head."

It was done in a moment. Then the Chief said to Tell, " Now, you proud man! Hear me! You Swiss boast of great skill in shooting. Now, stand off from that tree, and shoot that apple down for me."

Said William Tell in sorrow, " The fault is mine; my little boy has done no wrong. Kill me if you will. Why do you seek to kill my boy ?"

The chief replied, "No! I don't seek to kill your boy. I only bid you shoot the apple down. If your arrow hits the boy, the sin is yours, not mine."

All the men and women cried out in grief and anger. But the boy was bold and brave. He said to his father,

" Fear not, daddy; shoot straight. I shall not flinch." William Tell stood fifty paces from his boy, then bent his bow, and drew the shaft to his ear.

" It is done; it is done! and the boy is safe," criedthe crowd of men and w omen in joy. For the arrow flew straight and

sure; and it split the apple into two. But not a hair of the boy was hurt.

Now spoke the Chief, and said, " You have done well, both sire and son. I keep my word. Go home in peace and feed your sheep."

But William Tell stood tall and straight, and boldly said, "I give no thanks to you for keeping your word. This praise is due to God alone; for his grace alone helped me to shoot straight and true. But you, too, have cause to be thankful to Him. For if my aim had missed, I had a second arrow ready for you !"

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